

# John Paul DeJoria, owner of the Paul Mitchell empire takes us on his journey through poverty and struggle to a life of success.

By Suzanne Takowsky

John Paul DeJoria, CEO and co-founder of Paul Mitchell hair care systems is determined to leave his mark on the world. The "Cruelty Free" policy of the Paul Mitchell company was implemented in the early 80s when he took a stand against using animal by-products or conducting animal testing on his beauty care products. John Paul's aggressive statement proved to the world he could produce the finest beauty care products on the market, and still respect our planet and all its inhabitants.

John Paul's crusades are fueled by a passionate desire to right the wrongs of this world and his wife, Eloise, has been by his side through many of his quests. A native of Texas, Eloise was a successful model and actress before becoming a model for John Paul Mitchell Systems in 1993. The couple have one son together, Eloise has a son by a former marriage as does John Paul.

Some of the organizations the DeJoria's support are: Friends of Elk River which preserves rain forests, The Big Mountain Weaving Project, which helps the Diné tribe in Arizona by providing solar power and securing over a million acres of sacred tribal land; American Oceans Campaign, which protects the oceans of the world; City of Hope, the Special Olympics, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the Sea Shepherd. Originally started by Captain Paul Watson, the Sea Shepherd consists of boats about 200 feet long, with volunteer crew members that go into international waters where whales, dolphins, seals and other mammals are illegally hunted. According to John Paul, the Sea Shepherd doesn't hurt any people on board these hunting ships, but they damage the ships by ramming them and rendering them useless so they have to return to their original port. Also involved is hotel magnate Steve Wynn, who bought a small submarine with a scissor mechanism attached that cuts fishing nets to free any creatures trapped inside.

I interviewed the DeJorias at their magnificent home nestled in Malibu. John Paul recalls life before his success with Paul Mitchell and the events that changed the course of his destiny. Each tragedy he survived made his achievements more rewarding.

One of two children of immigrant parents, John Paul grew up in the midst of gang life in East Los Angeles. At six, he earned money selling Christmas cards; at nine he had a newspaper route. He says he struggled through a life that could have easily turned to tragedy, instead of eventual triumph and success. A watershed event in his life occurred at John Marshall High where he attended school. A teacher made him and fellow classmate stand up in front of the other students and stated, "These two will never succeed at anything in life." This prediction was proved wrong.

After high school, John Paul spent two years in the Navy and after jobs included selling ency-

clopedias, copy machines, dictating equipment and insurance. He also worked as a janitor, pumped gas and repaired bicycles. John Paul says he was fired from many jobs, and that he has been homeless twice. In 1980, he found himself divorced, without money to pay his rent, and he had sole custody of his three-year-old son. He and his son slept in the back seat of a car until a friend from high school, Lee Meyers, offered to let DeJoria and his son stay with him. John Paul says through it all he never gave up.

He eventually went on to work for the hair company Redken, where he teamed up with Paul Mitchell, a famous hairstylist. They sought financing to form their company, but no one would invest the money. So they pooled their resources of \$750.00 and started the company producing hair care products using Paul Mitchell's well-known name. The now famous black and white product packaging of Paul Mitchell products came about because he and Mitchell couldn't afford colored ink.

DeJoria and Mitchell soon found that success didn't come easy. "The first year and a half we went bankrupt every week," states John Paul. "But we just hung in there and didn't give up. We had to believe in ourselves. A lot of my strength came from when I was 19 and sold encyclopedias. I got doors slammed in my face all the time, but you don't stop, you just keep on going."

Eloise continues, "That's why John Paul is who he is today. He let it all roll off his shoulders; he kept the energy and motivation God gave him. Everybody deals with hardships differently. John Paul just deals with the positive. That's how he has survived, by not giving into negativity. In the process, he inspires those around him to do their best, and he helps in any way he can."

John Paul constantly lobbies in Washington, D.C., speaking with senators and congress members, trying to pass laws that makes it a criminal offense to remove codes or tamper with products that touch our skin or go inside our body. "There are people who take codes off everything from baby food to shampoo, so consumers can't tell where it was made, when it was made or if it's even the real product," John Paul says.

Eloise's efforts go towards helping those less fortunate. One charity she supports is the Texas' Austin Family House for battered women and abused children. "When I was a young girl, I remember helping women who were living on the streets and I took them to AA meetings," she says. "Many of them had drug and alcohol problems or had been sexually abused. It is not that these people came from a nice home and then went down. Most didn't have a chance from the beginning."

What started out as a \$750.00 investment on John Paul's part has turned into a multi-million dollar empire with distributors in 65 countries, and prod-



ucts going to 25,000 hair salons internationally. The Paul Mitchell company takes good care of its employees by providing lunch every day and reimbursing gas money to those who care enough about the environment to car pool. Employees are paid above the normal industry rate and some warehouse workers earn more than \$40,000 a year.

John Paul gladly shares the hardships of his life with others. "I'm really happy and very proud of where I am today. I want others to know that even though things can look hopeless, there is still hope and they shouldn't give up," he says.

Eloise continues, "The first place we can make a difference in this world is with our own families. Start with our own family, and then help our relatives and friends. If everyone would do that, there would be harmony in the world."

Motivating us by their example and inspiring all of us to do our part, Eloise and John Paul DeJoria are dedicated to making this planet a better place for all living beings. They are proof positive that what you put into this world comes back into your own personal world.